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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the development of the educational system of Botswana, a small south African country of one million, emphasizing its democratic origins and customs, historical influences, social trends, and economic support. Changes in the educational system, especially in universal primary education, since its independence from Great Britain in 1967 are discussed. Efforts to improve educational quality focus on reform of primary teaching methods, teacher preparation, and curriculum. Attempts to modernize the curriculum are also being made by the government, although the consequences for the traditional culture and pastoral economy of Botswana seem uncertain. Examined in the paper is the "two school culture" of Botswana, i.e., the rural, traditional, culture and the urban, modern culture. The author argues that the cultural differences between the rural and urban families are not so profound as in other countries; nevertheless, results reported from the 1982 primary school survey of 60 representative schools may indicate that school achievement reflects emerging differences between the two cultures. (DST)

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Family, Culture and Achievement in the Primary Schools of Botswana

Paper Presented at AERA
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Botswana is one of the world's most democratic countries. Its traditions and culture, as well as its people's political behavior and its leadership mark it as an open, friendly society in which everyone can participate as equals. An appreciation of its democratic traditions are essential if one is to understand its educational system and the plans its government has made for its future educational system.

Botswana is a country nearly the size of Texas, most of which is arid. Its population is about 1 million. In the West lies the Kalahari desert with a few widely separated villages serving some ranches. The Kalahari is the home of the few thousand Herrero and Sarwa or Bushmen who speak a language different from the Tswana. By far the largest number of people are the Batswana who speak Setswana. They are part of the large group of people in Southern Africa called collectively "Tswana." In the North the beautiful delta swamp country called the Okavanga is home to many types of wild animals from elephants to anteaters. Most of the people live along the eastern edge of the country not far from Zimbabwe and the Republic of South Africa. Some white Boer settlers occupied land in the fertile Timpopo valley late in the 19th century; their descendants still farm these lands and under Botswana law they have full citizenship. Since independence the number of white people living in the country has risen dramatically.

Between the Kalahari desert and the river valleys of the eastern edge, the geography is that of hilly Savanah, which is ranch country. This is the heart of the Batswana culture. The Batswana have been historically and still are ranchers who raise cattle. They prefer living in villages to city life. The largest city, Gaborone, is the capital and has about 60,000 people. The people living there do not refer to it as home. Many of those who own homes there also maintain homes in or near villages like Serowe and Lobatse. They go to their villages on weekends and holidays to be

with their relatives and to look after their cattle. The identification with the land, the village, and the tribal life is close.

The village life is the social center for the country. Tribal life means not only living close to the land but depending upon the tribal system for many customs and legal obligations. The tribal legal system is closest to Batswana people. It is the forum for disputes concerning property, marriage and family problems, use of the land and ownership of cattle. Tribal law is referred to as customary law which is a stage before formalized, written common law.

Botswana's democratic customs begin in the village and the tribe. In the village the Kgotla is the forum for discussing problems affecting everyone. The political life of the tribe centers in this institution which is like the New England town council. All men and women participate and can ask questions about any public problem, including school issues. Citizens over 18 can and do participate. The style of the meeting is orderly, businesslike, but unhurried; a mother can complain about a teacher who has been absent from one of the rural schools with no explanation for his absence. A young man can complain that fences have not been repaired and that cattle are running loose damaging gardens. The tone is polite--no one calls anyone names, no one shouts or uses bad language, and officials must answer questions put to them by even the humblest citizen. If the official does not know, and often he does not, the local member of parliament, or a regional official is sent for to appear at the next meeting of the Kgotla to provide an answer. The MP who has been embarrassed with a question about a school or road which he cannot answer returns to parliament in Gaborone and asks the same question of the minister of education or transportation. And the minister must answer the question. Democracy is direct and pervasive in the country. MP's do not behave like the lords of the earth as do congressmen in the U.S. They are accessible. If they were to take advantage of perquisites as U.S. congressmen do, they would be called to account for their expensive, lordly style back

in the Kgotla of their home village. They would be quickly brought to earth by the people who had elected them.

In 1967 Botswana became independent. It had been a protectorate of Great Britain since the late 19th century. Botswana's chiefs in 1895 negotiated with Great Britain for assistance in keeping the Boers from taking any more of the Tswana lands which the Boers had openly declared that they would occupy (Colclough and McCarthy, 1980, pp. 12-13). Great Britain thereupon sent a few troops to help the Tswana preserve the remaining lands for their own use and to keep the Germans and Portugese from moving in. The state of Bechuanaland as the British called it was as a protectorate. Few British officials lived in the country and the administrative center was outside the country, in the city of Mafeking, on Tswana land but in South Africa.

The British spent only four to five percent of a very small budget on education from 1936-55, and less than seven percent before independence (Colclough and McCarthy, p. 29). At independence there were 1,500 students in six secondary schools, one of which was public - it had been founded in 1965 (Colclough and McCarthy, p. 208). There were no postsecondary institutions. The secondary schools, the first of which began in 1944, were all academic. The educational system was of course, British. The content of the curriculum was British. Fewer than half of the primary age children, about 71,000 were in overcrowded primary schools in 1966. That figure had risen from 20,000 in 1955. There was no normal school or teacher preparation of any formal kind.

Botswana's educational system has seven standards of primary school and four forms of secondary. Every student has the right to seven years of primary schooling. The University of Botswana, founded soon after independence, now has a small graduate school as well as undergraduate programs. The country is now planning to extend universal education to six years of primary followed by three years of junior secondary school.

Botswana has made a heroic effort to get its youth into schools. Few nations have been so successful in achieving the goal of universal primary education in so short a time. Enrollments in 1979-80 were 180,00 in primary schools, 20,000 in secondary schools, about 900 in technical programs, 1000 in normal schools, and 1000 in the University of Botswana. More than nine out of ten school age girls and three out of four school age boys were estimated to be enrolled in primary schools in 1981 (Statistical Yearbook 1983, p. III-20). Those not attending primary schools, include children scattered in the Western deserts, the northern swamps, and the children of refugees from Zimbabwe.

The country's support of education increased from three million pula in 1974-75 to 14.3 million in 1979-80, an increase of nearly five times in five years. (Education in Botswana: A Statistical Guide, 1982.) Few other nations exhibited such an effort. Education accounted for about 12 percent of all government expenditures since 1978 (Statistical Yearbook, 1983, p. IV-5). The national government firmly believes that education is necessary for economic and social development. Education claims major attention of the nation's policy makers as they plan to extend the educational opportunities for the people of Botswana and improve the quality of the educational system.

Both these are major policy objectives of the government. It plans to extend the years of compulsory education from seven to nine years in order to provide more and better skilled people for the country's growing economic activity. Botswana's economy changed in the 1970's from a completely pastoral one to a heavy emphasis in mining and food processing. Within ten years the country will be the world's leading gem diamond exporter.

At least as important as quantitative growth is the country's commitment to improving the quality of education at all levels. A project to improve the quality of primary education was begun in 1981. The purpose of the project was to change the

teaching in primary schools from dependence upon memorization to emphasis on comprehension and application behaviors. This has required a complete overhaul of the country's teacher preparation, as well as retraining for all teachers and supervisors. The effects of this project on the achievement of students in the primary school will be discussed in this paper.

At the present time, every student in the seventh standard of primary school must take the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). This is a battery of achievement tests covering material which the students have been taught during their primary school years. The students must achieve sufficiently high on this test if they seek to enter secondary school. Competition for places in secondary school is keen as is obvious from the 1981 enrollment figures which show nine students in primary for every one in secondary school.

The pressure for more participation in secondary school arises in part from the shift of Botswana's economy from traditional to modern types of employment and in part from the fact that Botswana is a country with a very young population. The birth rate is about 3 percent and the median age is 15. Each new cohort is larger than the preceding one, and so far is better educated than the preceding one. The latter phenomenon is unusual in a developing country.

The ministry of education has had to attend more to quantitative growth than qualitative in the decade of the 70's. But this emphasis changed to concern for a qualitative shift in primary education in the 1980's. A national commission report in 1977 (Husen, 1977) called for reform of primary teaching and teacher preparation, and a new curriculum which moved away from rote memorization, drill and repetition of facts. The British Infant School and the American open classroom were examined in order to determine whether those models had some applicability in Botswana.

The policy objective of moving away from memorization activity in school to higher order mental processes was decided upon in Botswana with no urging from abroad. A decision of the entire government was made to modernize the curriculum. While the consequences of this shift for participation in a modern economy are foreseeable, other consequences in the traditional culture and economy are not so easy to predict.

A traditional pastoral economy interacting with a system of customary law requires extensive dependence upon the exercise of memory. A traditional tribal culture which all but a very few participate also requires the use of memory for rites, relationships and rules. The shift of a modern schooling system away from memorization implies a serious and extensive break with the traditional pastoral cultures. In accord with society's demands, schooling will emphasize different mental behaviors than the culture. While memorization will obviously not be completely eliminated as a mental behavior in schools, the policy objective is to emphasize those behaviors which fit into modern occupations rather than traditional ones. It will be interesting to see whether rural, more traditionally-reared children will do as well on the so-called higher level mental behaviors (Bloom, 1956) as the urban children. It is possible that children raised in urban areas* may do better on the upper level behaviors than rural children. This hypothesis will be tested in future years as the data from future administrations of the PSLE are analyzed.

The Ministry of Education in 1981 began a new national teacher training project which was intended to change the teaching-learning system in primary schools to one in which comprehension and application were emphasized. Memorization of facts can

*There are only two small cities in the country. The Capital, Gaborone has about 70,000 inhabitants, and the next largest modern city is Francistown with about 40,000. Serowe, nearly as large as Francistown, is a large tribal village.

never be dispensed with, but can be seen as one of a number of mental behaviors. Pupils were supposed to be actively involved in the learning process, and differences among pupils were to be recognized by providing different kinds of learning experiences in the classroom. The project was conceived and planned in part as a response to a survey of primary education carried out in 1976 (Husen, 1977).

The evaluation of the results of this project is ambitious and will take several years to accomplish. One step in the evaluation is to measure pupil achievement at various times during the project to determine whether there are results in classrooms. An obvious necessity in the measurement of pupil achievement is to use tests which include a comprehension and application tasks as well as retention of facts.

The Primary School Survey

In 1982, a survey of seventh standard children's achievement was carried out by the Examinations Unit of the Department of Curriculum and Evaluation of the Ministry of Education. The work was reported in 1982 (Primary Education Survey 1982). The survey was intended to provide base line data for the new Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP).*

Four hundred primary schools were the population of the survey. These were complete, seven standard public schools. A sample of 60 representative schools was chosen from the population. The distribution of the sample corresponded closely to distribution of all schools with respect to enrollment in the school and location.

The sample was stratified by size of enrollment in the school and urban-rural location (Primary Education Survey, pp. 2-5). Rural schools remote (more than 20

*Information on the progress of this project is presented in documents prepared by the project staff (Botswana Primary Education Improvement Project, 1982).

kilometers) from a rural center as well as those located in rural centers. Data in Botswana are unusually complete and reliable compared with other developing or developed countries (See the Location of Services in Botswana, July, 1981) for detailed information on the availability of government agencies and services in all locations of the country). The sample of pupils consisted of 867 girls (61%) and 562 boys (39%) which was close to the sex distribution of the 1976 survey (PES, p. 9). However, this was not reflective of the sex distribution in the public schools in 1982.

Three questionnaires were developed by the Research and Testing Centre of the Ministry of Education to obtain information on the primary schools and pupils (PES, p. 7). The questions were designed to parallel those used in the 1976 National Educational Commission survey. Pupils completed one concerning family background and education as well as their own interests and preferences in school. Teachers completed a form concerning their training, background, and performance in the classroom, and head teachers completed one on school resources.

Pupil, Family and Teacher Data

The pupils ranged in age from 11 to 19 with a median of 13.5 years (PES, p. 9). Standard 7 boys are older than girls (Education in Botswana, A Statistical Guide, Graph 23). Nearly half (48%) lived with both parents, and a third lived only with their mothers, while 14% lived with a relative or other person (PES, p. 10). Those children living away from parents include those who must leave the remote rural home in order to be close to a complete primary school which offers the seventh standard. Thirteen percent spent more than 30 minutes to get to school, while 65% spent at the most 15 minutes to get there (PES, p. 11). Some rural pupils have very long distances to walk. Buses are not provided for public school children.

Mothers of students were found to be better educated than fathers (PES, p. 11). Nearly half (45%) of the fathers and less than a third (31%) of the mothers had had no schooling. From 1974-80 proportion of female primary students remained at 55 percent (Education in Botswana, Table p. 22), whereas in Government-aided secondary schools, that proportion has grown from 48 percent in 1974 to 52 percent in 1980 (Education in Botswana, Graph 47).*

The amount of educational resources in homes has dramatically risen from the 1976 survey. Nearly half of the students (49%) reported having some books at home, compared to only one third in 1974 (PES, p. 12). Only one-seventh of the students said that they never read books for pleasure, and three-fourths reported that their parents encouraged them to read. Only 17% said they did not have a radio at home, compared to 27% in 1976 (PES, p. 13).

Most parents appeared to be interested in their children's school progress. Sixty percent of the students reported that their parents asked about their school work at least several times a week (PES, p. 13), and 58 percent of the students said their parents helped them with their home work at least once a week. Only one out of twenty students reported never doing homework.

Untrained teachers are a big problem, and one that the new teacher training project is attempting to solve. Well over half of the Standard 2 and 3 teachers (57% and 58% respectively) were labeled untrained (PES, p. 16). The fewest untrained teachers were assigned to standard seven (2%), standard six (13%), and standard one (25%). The rapid pansion of primary education and the pressure to put untrained

In spite of the preponderance of females in primary school, the proportion of men teachers is high compared with other countries. Only 14 percent of the teachers of standard three are males but this rises with each successive standard, so that a majority of standard seven teachers (52%) are men (PES, p. 15).

teachers in rural schools is apparent in these data. There was little improvement in the proportion of untrained teachers from 1974 (34%) to 1980 (32%). Not surprisingly, teachers have little experience; nearly 40 percent had one to five years of teaching experience, and three-fourths reported having from one to five years experience in their present school (PES, p. 17). Head teachers, or principals, reported having had a median of 8.4 years of teaching experience before becoming head teachers (PES, p. 26).

Lack of availability of textbooks is a serious problem. It is estimated that only about 75 percent of the students have textbooks in Setswana, English and mathematics (PES, p. 20). About one teacher in four reported having only one textbook for an entire standard in these subjects. The rural schools are the ones lacking textbooks. There were virtually no textbooks available for science and social studies in any school. The author observed teachers using lecture and pupil notebooks as the resources in these subjects, but some very creative and effective teaching in science was done by teachers who depended upon their own resource book and required pupils to observe and study their environment.

Teachers spent more time on English construction in standard 7 (a mean of 5.5 hours per week) than on any other subject. Mathematics occupied the next greatest amount of time (4.2 hours). These two subjects were the most prominent in the Primary School Learning Examination, for which so many teachers spent so much time preparing the seventh standard pupils. Teachers of the second and third standards are more likely to have difficulty with speaking and understanding English than those of other standards (PES, p. 25).

Achievement

Composite achievement scores are a combination of nine tests, respectively Botswana essay and objective achievement; English essay, objective achievement and aptitude; math objective achievement and aptitude; science, and social studies.

There were no differences found between sexes on the composite score upon which admission to secondary school is based (PES, p. 32). Girls had a higher mean on the Setswana essay and objective achievement, while boys had a higher mean on the Science and Social Studies. On the other five tests constituting the battery there were no differences.

The distribution of means by age assumed a positively skewed curve. The age group with the highest mean was the 13 year olds (PES, p. 33). They had a mean of three units higher than the 12 year olds. For age groups older than 13, the older the age group, the lower the mean; 16 year olds had the lowest mean. This tendency was true as well for each of the nine tests (p. 32).

The educational level of the parent was significantly related to achievement. For fathers and mothers, the more education, the higher the mean of the child was found to be (PES, p. 33). The relationship for mothers was somewhat stronger than for fathers. That relationship was true for all tests except the two Setswana tests, in which there was no relationship between parents' education and children's achievement (p. 32). While all parents speak Setswana, those who have some education raise children who are destined to be better in school. Setswana is the exception to all the research on achievement, but it must be pointed out that the last three standards (5, 6, 7) are the ones in which English is used as the median of instruction, while in the first four, Setswana is the vehicle, with English taught as a second language. By the crucial

age of school learning, the amount of Setswana spoken in the home is not related to success in that subject in school. It is also noteworthy that urban and rural families all speak Setswana in the home. In offices and workplaces the same is true except for situations in which there are English-speaking non-Botswana citizens found frequently. Therefore the speaking of Setswana is not a phenomenon related to urban or rural residence or to modern or traditional occupations.

The more often a pupil reports reading for pleasure, the higher that pupil's achievement is likely to be (p. .001, PES, p. 34). This is certainly a socio-economic variable and may well be highly related to reading ability which itself is measured in the aggregate test. It is important to remember that comparatively few recreational reading materials exist in Setswana, but most are in English. Therefore, this reading for pleasure variable is more likely related to ability to read in English.

A strong relationship was found between students' perception of their parents' opinion of pupils reading in their spare time and composite achievement (PES, p. 35). About one-fourth of the students reported that their parents thought recreational reading was a waste of time or didn't care whether the child did so.

Location of school was a very important variable related to achievement. Location was operationalized into four categories in order of most urbanized to most rural: towns, major villages, service centers, and rural. On all tests except the two Setswana tests, the more urban the pupils, the better they did on the test (PES, p. 37-38). The greatest differences from towns to rural locations were on English aptitude, with a difference of 7.8 (out of a standardized score of 60) in the means for pupils in both locations, and on mathematics aptitude on which town pupils had a mean 6.5 scoring units (out of 60) higher than the rural pupils.

There is a common finding across countries that rural students are handicapped in school achievement or at least do not perform as well. A classic question is whether that is true because rural schools are invariably not as favored as more urban

schools in virtually all indices of resources and teacher preparation, or whether it is because cultural factors affect the pupils achievement so strongly. Rural children, certainly in developing countries, often come from different cultures than the pupils in the core areas around cities or large towns, hence could be said to be from more traditional cultural backgrounds.

Both the English and mathematics aptitude tests were constructed to provide a chance for pupils to perform better than on achievement tests. However, on both aptitude tests the rural children performed even more poorly than their urban cousins did on the achievement tests. Obviously, achievement and aptitude are highly related, and aptitude is greatly affected by experience.

In Setswana essay and achievement tests, pupils from major villages (such as the tribal village of Serowe) performed best, followed by pupils from towns (such as Gaborone). Even on these the rural pupils scored below town pupils. The interesting exception to achievement trends in this country is Setswana, which is a national language and achievement in which was not related to number of years of parents' education. Achievement in Setswana does not work like other subject variables, possibly because learning it may be independent of the school setting. The children in the towns may be using English more than their more rural cousins. The major villages are important centers of the Botswana culture in which Setswana is used more extensively. Children in remote rural schools who use Setswana almost exclusively and who are most likely to have teachers who do not know English were still handicapped compared to the town pupils when it came to writing their language. This finding appears to be parallel with those on the Vai tribal groups in Liberia as described by Erickson (1984). Two groups who were literate in Vai, one which had been schooled, and one which had not, wee compared on higher order mental tasks which were similar to those taught in schools. The schooled Vai did much better on these mental tasks, which suggested to the researchers that exposure to the culture of schooling equips

people for certain kinds of mental tasks, and without schooling these tasks are not performed well. In the case of the rural youngsters who did about as well as the urban children in Setswana, they have not been in school situations, where the culture of schooling has matured or found full expression. Untrained rural teachers who have few or poor materials can't establish the ambience of a school such as one finds in the urban areas. In the urban areas, memorization is more apt to be a primary tool upon which the teacher imposes higher order mental tasks, such as comprehension, abstraction, classification or generalization. Those tasks are essential in both mathematics and science. In science, even where there are no textbooks trained urban teachers are more apt to use classification, induction, or generalization than the rural teacher, who is often a product of a rural school, and whose education is only seven standards. Those teachers have not been exposed to a acculturated kind of urbanized school which demands higher order reasoning behavior of children. One can classify such mental behaviors as pertaining to urbanized schools with curriculum preparing students for modern occupations - which do not place a premium on memorization but on comprehension and application.

Composite achievement was related highly ($p < .01$) to the presence of electricity, water, radio, and a garden in the school, and health personnel visits to the school (PES, p. 39). Such advantages pertain to the more urban settings so are not surprising.

The number of hours of instruction per week in a subject and pupil achievement in those subjects were related only in two subjects, English and science achievement. In both subjects the relationship was curvilinear. For science achievement the maximum effect was evident with three hours of science per week (PES, p. 41). The lowest achievement ws found with one hour per week, and five hours a week was

related to the next lowest category of achievement. A similar finding for English achievement revealed a maximum yield on pupil means from six hours of instruction, which was much higher than seven hours of instruction, which was the maximum, or three hours of instruction, which was the minimum.

In Botswana the cultural differences between urban and rural families are not so profound as in many other countries. Primarily, families living in the large towns are of the same cultural background as the rural people. Families living in Francistown and Gaborone go back often to their "homes." They do not call their residences in the capital city or the other large towns their homes. Family and tribal ceremonies require their presence in their home villages, as well as their cattle-raising interests.

There is not a severe cultural break or contrast between tribal groups. All but a few thousand people are Batswana. There is not, then, a culture near the "core" towns which is different from the rural areas or tribal villages, as there is in many African countries. Cultural unity exists. What may be emerging and what school achievement data may be reflecting, is the emerging contrast between the "modern" Batswana culture and the more "traditional" Batswana culture. The cultural characteristic which all members share is the language, but other characteristics are changing rapidly in the urban areas. Those most economically active people, in the modern sense, live in urbanized locations, while those in rural areas still largely participate in traditional economic pursuits such as cattle tending.

The nation is rapidly modernizing. Diamond mining, coal mining, and the growth of a modern governing and entrepreneurial class are surely sewing the seeds of greater inequality, both economically and culturally. The almost idyllic folk democracy may change soon into a more class-structured unequal one in which participation is a function of economic class and location. The government of Botswana is attempting to promote equality by extending the opportunities for more schooling, with the

possibility of wider participation in the more modern economy. Hopefully, this ambitious plan to provide two more years of schooling for all and a more improved and modern-oriented primary school system will be accompanied by other efforts to expand the modern economy but not damage the traditional economy. In fact, there are efforts to strengthen the traditional economic sector at the same time that the modern sector expands. It can be argued that the more one "helps" the traditional economic sector, the less traditional it is, and the more dependent upon the government's policies.*

Botswana is a country with two school cultures. Its rural schools which are close to tribal life, and whose poorly trained teachers use exclusively memorization, and its modern schools with a curriculum which are more apt to emphasize mental tasks above memorization contrast sharply with each other as types. The government of Botswana intends to modernize all schools. This will separate the rural school culturally and psychologically from its immediate surroundings and prepare its successful students more than at present to have rural life and enter urban life and occupations. The failures will have to remain in the rural areas. This contrast of the two school cultures, will be another example of rural and urban cultural dynamics working themselves out in a modernizing society. There are many examples of this in the developing world. In Botswana the rural and urban children, attending two different school cultures, are different from children of other countries only in that they come from the same tribal culture. But the dimension of modernism-traditionalism in economic life as in schooling will have markedly different effects on their achievement in school, unless the government's policy of modernization of all schools is far more effective than it has been in most countries.

*U.S. "family" farms are an excellent example--they are so dependent upon U.S. agricultural policies that their owners are virtually employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Cultures are hardy, resilient, always changing, and their currents and directions cannot be predicted. In the rare country where society, represented by official policy, and culture are so much in harmony, as in Botswana, the culture may be powerful enough to correct society's errors in attempting to transform an economy too quickly, or modernize a people too suddenly. Botswana people are strong, happy, and optimistic. They will certainly modernize their culture, but meanwhile they will maintain traditions essential to their culture.

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